

RACE AND INSANITY.

By JAS. G. KIERNAN, M.D., CHICAGO,

LATE MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT COOK COUNTY HOSPITAL FOR INSANE.

THE NEGRO RACE.¹

THE number of negroes suffering from paranoia² admitted to the Cook County Asylum was comparatively large; when it is remembered that the intellectual phenomena of this psychosis are such as would enable the negro paranoiac to pass muster as a superior person to the average member of his race. At the same time the fact that Chicago is a commercial city, permitting comparative equality on the part of the negro, leads to the quick incarceration of such persons, when brought in contact with Aryans and Shemites, for the mental phenomena displayed would be such as to lead to a rapid suspicion of insanity by a sceptical, practical Aryan or Shemitic business man. For example, one of the most marked cases of this type claimed to have been persecuted by means of mesmerism, the fact of which he accepted but ascribed to witchcraft, as a sane but ignorant man might have done. The talk of witchcraft renders a practical business man suspicious of insanity, and would soon bring the mental condition of an otherwise seemingly intelligent negro under suspicion. The case is as follows:

CASE I.—T. A., æt. forty-three, was born in Mississippi, of a family in which nervous disease existed. Skull decidedly tectoccephalic; occiput flattened. No history of early life attainable,

¹ A series of studies in ethnological psychiatry.

² Synonymous with *monomanie systematisée*, monomania of Spitzka, primäre Verrücktheit of the Germans.

except that he was a bright boy, and worked for a doctor named Mansfield, at whose home he saw some experiments in "mesmerism," soon after which he had what seems to have been a dream passing into a systematized delusion that he was destined to be a prophet of great medical ability. He evidently experienced some anomalous sensations, and was auditorily hallucinated in a disagreeable way. He was about, or soon after, this time an inmate of a hospital for the insane, placed there in consequence of a complaint made before a justice of the peace that the Mansfield family had bewitched him. He evidently believed that there were laws against witchcraft still on the statute-books, as he from time to time pestered lawyers in the attempt to have these alleged laws enforced. Soon after an interview with a lawyer on the subject of witchcraft laws, he committed larceny, and was sent to a State prison. The larceny was committed under the influence of an hallucination, and his conviction was due to his own confession, made with the idea of securing protection from persecution by incarceration in the prison, where it appears he studied several trades, and made an endeavor to learn law, in order to punish his persecutors, who, he believed, were liable to the law. At about the time his term in the State prison was nearly expired, he became convinced from some newspapers that a large fortune had been left him, and that the continued persecution of the Mansfield family was due to the fact that in order to prevent him from securing the fortune and achieving the destiny already mentioned, they found it necessary to make him crazy. He was, in consequence of this, sent to the Elgin Hospital for the Insane. From there he was sent to Jefferson, in 1875, whence his perverse tendencies subsiding, he was discharged "cured," but soon after was sent to Joliet Penitentiary, for larceny, evidently of hallucinatory origin. While there he was hoaxed into believing that John H. Logan and General Grant had had the witchcraft laws repealed, and upon learning this his persecutorial delusions and hallucinations began to increase in number and force. He cut off his thumb, and made an attempt to cut his throat, in consequence of his hallucinations, which commanded him so to do, lest a worse thing happen. On his second entrance into the Cook County Hospital for the Insane, he remained for about two months relatively quiet, being under the belief that after Jan. 1, 1885, Gov. Oglesby would enforce by common law an action for conspiracy against his persecutors. February 1, 1885, his persecutory delusions again became active, and he struck a patient, who had the habit of talking in response to hallucinated voices, claiming that the latter was informing the Mansfield family of his whereabouts. From this time his delusions became less dominant, and he was sent out to work on parole with the kalsominers, and worked well for a while, until one of these men (all of whom were ex-ward workers) ridiculed him as a "nigger crank," for having such ideas as witchcraft, which he at first took in a relatively calm manner, until it was repeated in an offensive way, when he struck one of his tor-

mentors, and immediately refused to work, having new material for his delusions of persecution. He cited Grant's illness as an evidence that his persecution was about to stop, since the people would see that this illness of Grant was due to the latter's action in having the witchcraft laws repealed. He, at this time, became relatively quiet, proclaimed his abilities and his claim to his fortune with much more freedom than formerly, when he was rather secretive for fear of fresh persecution. It may be said that this man scouted Voodooism as having any thing to do with his persecution. It was, he said, all nonsense, but the mesmerism was a different thing. He was transferred to Kankakee, whence he escaped, went to Washington, and called on President Cleveland, in order to have the mesmeric influence of the doctor aforesaid removed by enforcement of the common law against conspiracy.

The other four cases, two men and two women, were tecto-cephalic, with flat occiputs; had all been guilty of attempts at homicide in consequence of systematized delusions, but these delusions were to some extent really the indirect result of bad treatment. One of the women had sexual delusions, directly due to the fact that males had been allowed keys to the female wards. Paranoia among negroes is usually accompanied by a relatively high amount of intelligence and education. The reasoning of T. A. on his delusions was decidedly logical. The man at times fully recognized the insane nature of some of his imperative conceptions, but referred these to witchcraft, as he called mesmerism, and his explanation of the way these ideas were introduced into his mind closely resembled the description which Matthews¹ gave of his own case. T. A. said that the first evidence he had of the influence of mesmerism was that he could not think his own thoughts; then they introduced crazy ideas into his head, and he could only think these ideas. In a barbaric country T. A. would have founded a kingdom or a religion. In the United States it is by no means improbable that he might have played the part of a Guiteau, but for his arrest before reaching President Cleveland.

¹ Haslam: "Illustrations of Madness."